


**NURSE EDUCATION IN RHEUMATOLOGY**

In March 1981 the inaugural meeting of the Royal College of Nursing Rheumatology Nursing Forum was held in Manchester. A show of hands survey of the 45 trained nurses present revealed that only one nurse had received formal education and preparation in the specialty prior to taking up her post as a Ward Sister and three nurses were at the time of the meeting undertaking the Joint Board of Clinical Nursing Studies (J.B.C.N.S.) extended courses at the Royal Devonshire Hospital in Buxton. Of the remaining 41 participants, 37 had entered the specialty by chance rather than by career design and were Ward Sisters in charge of rheumatology wards. Participants at the meeting all agreed that the knowledge and skill they had achieved in the specialty was experiential and whilst this mode of learning was not to be deprecated totally, they were no less certain that this mode of learning was inefficient and time-consuming.

With this state of affairs highlighted during the first meeting of the Rheumatology Nursing Forum (R.N.F.) it was obvious that a prime aim of the new organization must be to redress the balance and to seek to afford all nurses (since all would encounter the rheumatic disease patient amongst their patient population at one time or another), but particularly those practising in the specialty, the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills required if patients were to receive an acceptable standard of nursing care.

In July 1983 the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting (U.K.C.C.) replaced several (statutory) bodies previously in control of nursing education to become the one body concerned with the regulation of training and examinations in the United Kingdom. The U.K.C.C. is further charged with improving and maintaining standards of professional nursing practice and is therefore the disciplinary body of the nursing profession. There are four National Boards of the U.K.C.C. who are concerned with the regulation of post-basic nursing education and the English National Board (E.N.B.) replaced the J.B.C.N.S. in providing the curricula and approving hospitals as educational centres for the provision of post-basic courses in specialist areas of nursing. This control of course content and clinical experience means that a universally accepted attainment in nurse education is recognizable. Similar arrangements exist in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The E.N.B. provides curricula for two types of rheumatology nursing course:

(a) The Extended course of 28 weeks duration with successful completion leading to a certificate of competence (Course 382 for S.R.N.s and 388 for S.E.N.s).
(b) The Short course of four weeks duration with successful completion leading to a certificate of attendance (Course 983 for S.R.N.s and S.E.N.s).

The extended course curriculum has been available for more than three years but to date only the Devonshire Royal Hospital, Buxton actually runs these courses. The curriculum for the short course was hard fought for by the R.N.F. and was eventually secured in January 1983. To date, several hospitals have expressed interest in providing the short course and it is hoped that these negotiations may soon bear fruit. There is an urgent need for more hospitals to run these specialized courses thereby rendering them geographically and financially available to more nurses.

The R.N.F. recognizes the need for courses certified by the profession's statutory body but, in addition, highlights the necessity of study days and short courses arranged under the direction of rheumatologists in local hospitals. Many rheumatology units and hospitals provide such study days and courses lasting from one to 10 days. These courses could be the means of providing both nurses practising in the specialty and other general nurses the opportunity to study in more depth the various rhematic diseases. In this way nurses could be updated with the ever-changing care of the rheumatic disease sufferer. It is unrealistic to believe that short courses such as these could be the means of educating nurses to the depth and breadth required of the skilled rheumatology nurse, however such courses have a definite role to play and deserve greater attention. The Honorary Officers of the R.N.F. are willing to advise programme organizers of members who are able to speak on study programmes and will advise on course content if approached.

Although much of this Editorial dwells on the needs of nurses and their education, none of us works in isolation and I am aware of similar needs within other health professions. The steering group of the 'British Health Professionals in Rheumatology' is currently organizing the inaugural meeting of that organization* for 25 January 1985, and through this Journal I would like to ask rheumatologists to bring this to the attention of their colleagues.

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* Application forms for the meeting to be held at the Royal College of Nursing can be obtained from: Mrs N. Price, Physiotherapy Department, Newmarket General Hospital, Newmarket, Suffolk.